Tree, Map, Container: Metaphors for the History of Art Education

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"At one point I started to think of [the] history of art education as a cartoon fight—a big, churning swirl of ideas in which many of the theories and innovations just add to the swirl. Every once in a while a great idea, much like a cartoon foot or fist, emerges, breaking free of the mass. These are ideas that change the course of education and have a lasting impact on the daily workings of our schools. Other ideas emerge from the swirl, only to wither and fade when proven that they don't really work, and still other ideas weave back and forth as they go in and out of style."

—Graduate student's perception of the history of art education

Many graduate programs in North America require a course in the history of art education for master and doctoral students. The implementation of such a requirement indicates the advanced development of our discipline (Chalmers, 1999). Specialized scholarship and the accumulation of a pool of like minds to trace the past contribute to the formation of a discourse (Foucault, 1972). Retracing the way a specific field of knowledge came about also lays the foundation and sets the boundaries of its paradigm (Kuhn, 1970). For those in art education to avoid entrapment in the status quo and for the scholarship of art education to undergo any dynamic paradigm shift, an understanding of the history of the discipline certainly benefits both practitioners and theorists.

Graduate students enrolled in a required course in the history of art education may, however, carry with them their own agenda and learning baggage. Following is a list of concerns students shared with me regarding what some deemed tedious facts set in stone: Will we be reading voluminous collections about past happenings and events that took place before we were born? What is the purpose of studying people from the past centuries who disagreed with one another? How can these classic texts and readings be relevant to my personal life and professional practice?

Similar questions may cross the minds of learners encountering regimented lessons during mandatory schooling; however, younger learners may experience difficulties redirecting their frustration to appropriate means of contesting obligatory instruction. When learners of all ages fail to see connections between their learning experience and educational outcomes, they are less motivated to engage actively, creatively, and responsibly in the construction of their own knowledge. This is most apparent when my graduate students are full-time art teachers working daily in the often-hostile public school environment. They return to graduate education, not merely seeking continuing credits for licensure renewal but also earnestly searching for answers and solutions to cope with their harsh realities.

This curriculum case study highlights visual metaphors as an alternative means of understanding history and represents what Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined as perceived, constructed, and created realities. Creative endeavors, an outcome of restructuring graduate curriculum and organizing the class as a learning community, have helped students who are adult learners with varied learning styles infuse what they are learning with meaning. Their experimental projects demonstrate how embracing artmaking as inquiry can perhaps serve as springboards to dive into ideas useful in the teaching of the histories of other disciplines at other levels.

Understanding the Necessity of Metaphor

Metaphoric projection is a primary cognitive process to solidify comprehension and enhance learning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Sense-making by infants forms immanent basic schemata, intimately connected with language formation, enabling intellectual reasoning and abstract thinking later in life and ultimately engendering imaginative ways of seeing. At the secondary and tertiary levels of cognition, complex metaphors draw connections to subordinate examples to elaborate on category systems while conceptual metaphors blend feelings and thinking into rationale and transform intuition into amenable reality (Efland, 2004). Serig (2006) conducted research with
At the beginning of class when we were being asked if the history of art education had gone in a straight line, ... I said it moved in a spiraling line, sometimes cycling around ideas before really progressing past them. Over the course of the semester, as we got into the readings a bit more, I started to notice that some of the ideas and issues teachers struggled with during the 19th century, are THE things I still have problems with 200 years later.

a group of artists showcasing their interweaving of cognitive, personal, and social domains into the creation of visual metaphors, which were a manifestation of their thoughts and working processes.

The final project for my class abandoned the traditional linear, typed outline of a history of art education. Students' visual representation included text extracted from class journals and various online projects submitted to a secure VISTA class site throughout the semester. As a creative timeline format it still had to encapsulate all the class readings as well as a book review and personal readings. In addition, to optimize collaborative effort in the class learning community, students could scaffold their thoughts, using other classmates' postings during online discussion to deepen their personal reflection. Students were also encouraged to include any art educators studied during the course or encountered at any time during their education, who they believed influenced their practice and learning. An assessment rubric to measure the content, coherence, clarity, and creativity of this project was established as a class.

In class we also examined how a contemporary megaconceput, such as globalization, could be traced back in time and how Chanda (2007) used themes and categories against time flow to construct a timeline for clarity in comparing and contrasting information. Because students' timelines were visual in nature, they included a written explanation similar to artists' statements in exhibition catalogues with an additional prediction of how the field would transform or where art education is headed in the future. Furthermore, the visual timeline was to be presented orally with a short PowerPoint presentation to complete the investigation as a social endeavor supported by evidence from class resources, peer feedback, and outside sources to establish each case.

What follows are a few visual timelines that convey the history of art education. To represent each creative timeline as a composite of both in-progress thoughts and outcome, I combined two software programs widely used in art classrooms (PowerPoint and Photoshop) to re-create the eight figures in this manuscript. Each composition became a collage consisting of multiple images superimposed with explanatory text (students' narratives of their creative process and ideas). Perhaps partial and incomplete, they are nonetheless multilayered and interwoven with historical facts, theoretical underpinnings, and students' voices. I hope this method of representing visual narrative in print motivates others to consider conveying their everyday actions and decisions through innovative outlets by which they can share their complex ways of knowing.

Through intense interaction and meaningful questioning, students interwove the texts into their life stories and further shaped their professional identities. Major ideas from a few classic texts initially provided the conceptual framework, but the works themselves attest to the way visual metaphors can embrace sophisticated cognition. Direct quotation of students' stories juxtaposed with my interpretations has recontextualized each timeline as a prototype to transform public problems into personal ones. To categorize the works, I made use of three archetypes found in many cultures—a tree, a map, and a container—to formulate metaphorical questions as themes.

What if History Grows Like a Tree?

Stankiewicz (2001), who conducted her inquiry at the turn of the 21st century, formulated her research questions by comparing and contrasting what happened during the 19th and 20th centuries with the present. She constructed a table that included goals for art instruction, art forms, media, styles, subject matter, functions and contexts of art education, professional dynamics, and the people involved. Tracing roots with such a clear comparison helped Gretchen, a high school art teacher, produce her timeline as a sophisticated assemblage, embodying the progression of ideas in a tree-like structure. (See Figure 1.)

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Gretchen reflected on her decision to choose Monet's *Water Lilies* as an image on the base of her timeline to buttress her structure: "If art education had to climb out of the primordial ooze at the beginning of time, I would like to think that it looked like the first work of art that I truly fell in love with, and for me it represents my beginning in art." The 19th-century romantic notion of art has been pervasive in the field of art education, but regrettably the marginal role of arts education has become a historically situated issue in contemporary schooling. Gretchen envisioned the future as a rocketship-like paintbrush with a *Starry Night*-inspired design on it because although [seemingly] dazzling and bright, sometimes I fear that view may be the painting of an [unbalanced] person. Some days I think art education can only get better and reach new heights, gaining importance and credibility along the way; and other days I am not so hopeful and not even sure where it is headed.

The idea of an organic timeline inspired Kelly, who had a concentration in ceramics, to represent her understanding as a naturalistic-looking tree, molded with clay (see Figure 2). After firing in a kiln at home, she painted the tree with colorful glazes and wove written messages like ribbons in and out of its branches. Kelly, a middle school art teacher, observed that school art "began with drawing geometric shapes without a lot of individual creativity!" Art learning devoid of creativity is one feature of school art practiced across America from the mid-1800s that is difficult to romanticize. Inherited from the atelier model in Europe prior to the Renaissance, workshops of craftpersons or artisans and the studios of renowned artists were educational sites where young artists acquired skills by copying, modeling, or working alongside the masters as assistants. In China, pottery apprentices learned their trade in this manner at kiln sites until the mid-1900s, their training often including years of performing

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for their masters all kinds of miscellaneous chores not directly associated with learning the crafts at all (Dai, 2009). Cross-referencing timelines from different regions of the globe acts like a graft upon the stem of history and can stimulate the growth of a new branch in art education.

Lindsay, who taught K-3 in an urban setting, constructed a more abstract tree with a variety of materials assembled by various methods (see Figure 3). Specifically identifying with education pioneer Johann Pestalozzi, she admired his vision because he “believed that art should be taught [to children] in order to further [their] cognitive development”; however, Lindsay also acknowledged that “the roots of art education... include the invention of photography, proving that science had a huge effect on art.” Just as the scientific discovery of light and the invention of the camera fundamentally changed the artist’s role and the means of capturing representation, scientific inquiry was also a major force that changed the face of art education. The progressive era lent credibility to what art education can do for students. During the inquiry process Lindsay built the trunk of her timeline with the slats of a window blind, affirming that “art is like a window into every subject—all subjects can be taught through art and understood through art.” She split the trunk into six panels, each representing a sprout on the tree of history. Although multicultural and interdisciplinary studies are considered as separate in the field, both bloomed into instrumental and integrated lessons involving art in social studies, math, and poetry, thus broadening horizons for Lindsay and her students beyond art for art’s sake.

What if History Is a Map?

Like contemporary artists, art historians have used big ideas to conceptualize their work and initiate their inquiries; so do historians of art education. Efland (1990) asked: “Does history move in a straight line, or is it cyclical? What accounts for the transformation? Were changes a result of pedagogical fashion or occurring social realities?” (p. ix).

For some students these changes were manifested in the early years of their teaching lives, and the mapping of history was manifested in their final projects. The nexus of social, political, economic, and cultural forces that shape curriculum content, structure the context of contemporary art education, and condition the working milieu of beginning art teachers can be overwhelming. How to navigate the uncharted waters at the start of their voyage and where to anchor are questions that art teachers find daunting when first encountering the many orientations and approaches in the field. It is at such juncture that a map or mapping out one’s terrain can facilitate the journey. I perceived a map as an instrument to help us plan our route, providing a kind of orientation that allows us to ignore what’s not essential to reach our destination faster. Lyn created a self-portrait with 16 sections (see Figure 4), each section completed with mediums, techniques, and art styles to represent the aspects of the history of art education that have most impacted her teaching philosophies. Behind the portrait, detailed explanations accompanying each of the sections characterized her pivotal learning as a shift in focus from singular concentration to acceptance of diversity, from stagnation to triumph at its multiple possibilities.
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As part of an ongoing learning process in the classroom learning community, Stephanie contemplated the creation of her timeline in the form of a weaving in which 10 blocks of colors in the warp symbolized 10 important [topics] in the history of art education (see Figure 5). Her rationale follows:

Each block in the warp has fixed meaning in history that cannot be changed; however, the colors are changed through my hand painting a gradation to symbolize my selection of all these basic ingredients as history. [In contrast], the weft, which represents the present day and the future, constantly changes, the different colors representing the experiences and knowledge that we bring to the field, taking the past and what molded our thoughts to make the future into what we want. We are the future.... As educators [we] influence others' futures through art education.

Here the weft and warp are similar to latitude and longitude on maps to locate landmarks and points of reference just as a teaching philosophy provides a guiding statement for one's situated positions and directions. Once students understand how history relates to their teaching philosophy, they can inject new meanings into their understanding. Mari, who had degrees in art history and psychology and worked toward her Master of Arts in Teaching at the time of this study, stated her perception of history as equivalent to "a flowing of ideas over the ages. The circles represent that ideas are always evolving to reach an ultimate goal, to spread the passion and heart that goes into each work of art." (See Figure 6.)

Transforming her role and identity, Mari was empowered to proclaim, "The future of art education holds elements of social reform and social justice but creativity and innovation is fundamental." Coincidentally, in the fall of 2008 Mari predicted the theme of the 2011 National Art Education Association National Convention—"Creativity, Imagination, and Innovation." Perhaps when adult learners can demonstrate their understanding of history in unconventional ways, they open up more possibilities in the future for imagination and speculation in art education history and historiography (Bolin, 2009).

What if History Is a Container?

The coedited collection of essays in Remembering Others (Bolin, Blandy, & Congdon, 2000) conveyed the greatest leap in terms of reconceptualizing history. Expanding what is considered worthy of historical study, these editors moved beyond the study of written documents by adopting the theoretical framework of Peter Burke (as cited in Bolin et al., 2000, p. 34) to organize their text. The individual chapters provided exemplary research on how history can be generated by multiple responses, affirming the axiom that objective history does not exist.
As art educators I think we are responsible for tackling many issues, far more than in years past.

I believe we [will] put a greater emphasis on professional development and working with other educators to enhance our field in the future.

The text impacted Daisy, who settled on a purse metaphor. When asked about her rationale, the full-time art teacher working in a residence for severely handicapped patients/students with extraordinary special needs said: “Because I carry my life in my purse.” Discovering minimal information on inclusion in most of the classic art education texts for her creative timeline, Daisy declared that “Everyone should have a different way to portray the history of art education and her or his own special way to improve art education in the future.” (See Figure 7.)

Daisy’s purse served as a kind of container. “Categories are containers into which like things are grouped” (Efland, 2004, p. 762). In all civilizations innumerable artifacts are created and used as containers before designating them with specific functions. The embellishments of the forms and shapes and the dictation of their names and labels emerged even later. Containers are essential for the continuation of civilization, just as categories are indispensable for deeper levels of cognitive engagement. Metaphorically speaking, containers are vital to deep learning so that one can revisit concepts and ideas when one is ready. To dig out knowledge in one scoop for easy disposal and transfer necessitates containers, utensils, or boxes. To house theories, concepts, or ideologies too large for immediate consumption or for direct use also requires the use of containers with storage capacity to leave enough room to stock what’s dear to the heart for future appreciation. Many technological gadgets (iPhone, iPad, and iPod) can be regarded as containers: Even their advertising strategies include slogans that proclaim their capacity to store sizable amounts of information and capacious personal preferences for speedy retrieval.

Beyond accumulation and transport convenience, containers can also be connected to our habit of consumption of both edible food and food for thought. In this regard, even a burrito can be a container. Sara conceptualized the history of art education as a burrito fashioned with fabric, Velcro, Sharpie marker, and Sculpey clay (see Figure 8). She explained:

From the outside a burrito [looks like] a plain shell, just as [all school] art tends to look [identical] from the outside. To reinforce this idea, I wrote down some generalized statements, traditionally made by people outside the art world: Art is fun, Art is an easy A, Art is nice, and Art is pretty. Once you get past the initial general appearance and learn more about art through a quality educational experience, you will see that art has much more to offer.
Some art education history is necessary for art educators to know and acknowledge—like valuable things in my purse, such as my identity (license, Social Security card, and credit card), money, and keys; and other necessities like medicine, phone, pen, make-up, tissues, and more.

But I also carry some junk like paper trash, random candy wrappers, and some crumbs. . . . Some history is like junk, trash that we learned but wasn’t very valuable, that I forget right away.

Implications

The elasticity of a timeline is relative as we zoom in and out of time, adjusting where and what we want to focus on. To reach one final conclusion about the history of art education has become increasingly difficult because no overarching history exists for all, nor does a single way of telling the story prove effective. Ultimately, the study of history is intended to engender historical consciousness, the development of which can challenge the order of things in the Foucauldian sense, specifically in terms of the awareness of the power of knowledge and the problem of representation inherent in such consciousness (Hills, 2005).

In this way, developing historical consciousness can become an impetus to cultivate the kind of creativity recognized by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) to revolutionize both the content and methodology of a field or domain. When I experimented with methods of arts-informed and arts-based inquiries to redesign the course, I was guided by Sullivan (2005), who wrote of the "effort to push the boundaries and to look anew..., prompted by

Figure 7. My Personal Handbag of History: Daisy.

Figure 8. A Burrito of Art Education Timeline: Sara.
[the] belief that being artful means making ideas happen" (p. ix). Below are a few alternative project ideas that can be easily plugged into an online WIKI system for further development but can also serve the teaching and study of histories of other disciplines:

- A historiographical project zooming in on each of the social, economic, political, psychological, and cognitive dimensions of the arts and education (Feldman, 1996). Ramifications of how these dimensions interplay in educational settings in different communities could provide a more comprehensive view of the international history of art education (Stankiewicz, 2007). The emphasis may trace specifically how visual art joined and separated from music, dance, vocational, or physical education to become one elective or several school subjects in the public education system.
- A concentration in the history of art education that deals with the imaginative reconstruction of a period of time through the writing of a screenplay. Imagine yourself as a movie director, paying homage to extraordinary individuals who made a difference (e.g., revolutionary changes in style, form, training, and educational methods; use of materials; paradigm shifts in the content of the arts or reconceptualization of the discipline and pedagogy; interdisciplinary engagement and development).
- Follow the trail of those traditionally underrepresented and invisible by investigating the unheralded stream of art educators and scholars who have shaped practice in the field of art education as well as the educational values and beliefs of the past and present. Because collecting oral history requires simple approval by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), students with little research background can easily develop such a project, culminating in video documentation.

Our conception of time is fundamentally interconnected with the experience of our changing, growing, and aging bodies as well as conditioned by the deep structure of our cultural understanding of what's ephemeral and what's eternal. The September 2010 issue of Scientific American was dedicated to a discussion of the end of time with the collapse of the universe and the overthrow of previous hypotheses of an infinite universe that lasts forever. Nevertheless, the human imagination brooks neither boundaries nor limitations.

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REFERENCES


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